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Leah Remini’s Attack on the Church of Scientology

Introduction

The Church of Scientology has 10 million members worldwide, almost equivalent to the Methodist church in the United States with a membership of 12.5 million members. The Church of Scientology is based off of Dianetics that was founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1952. Both Tom Cruise and John Travolta have gained substantial status within the church as they have used their celebrity status to give credit to the Church of Scientology. Now as the head of the church, David Miscavige has led the church into modern society with multiple locations spanning from the headquarters Gilman Hot Springs, California (Church of Scientology International 2018)

Scientology believes “Scientology is a religion that offers a precise path leading to a complete and certain understanding of one’s true spiritual nature and one’s relationship to self, family, groups, Mankind, all life forms, the material universe, the spiritual universe and the Supreme Being.” (Church of Scientology International, 2018). Locations of the church include Los Angeles, Pasadena, San Francisco, Seattle, New York, Washington, DC, London, Berlin, Brussels, Madrid, Mexico and Johannesburg.

Leah Remini, known for her role in King of Queens publically left the Church of Scientology after 30 years in 2013. She joined at an early age with her mother when she started dating a Scientologist (Bindrim, 2015). She wrote the book *Troublemaker: Surviving Hollywood and Scientology*, in 2015 that led to the conversation about how her story with the Church of Scientology was relatable to many who had left the church. In her book she describes her commitment to the church with a total investment of $5 million dollars over her 30 years with the church (Bindrim, 2015). Also in the book she explains the core of the church with Operating Thetans (OTs), Training Routines (TRs), Master-at-Arms (MMAs) and MEST work (matter, energy, space and time). She goes into great detail with the regimes to give her audience more of an understanding of the church since most like other churches, having regimes is unfamiliar. At the forefront of the book are the knowledge reports that are conducted to expose other members of the church for their wrongdoings, in other words tattle tailing (McNiff, Bentley, Sancho, Welsh, & Effron, 2015). She even states how she wrote up knowledge reports of her husband, Angelo, “all the time” (McNiff et al., 2015)

Situation Leah Remini used her status to draw up a documentary series with A&E titled ‘Leah Remini: Scientology and the Aftermath’ network disclosing what the Church of Scientology teaches behind what she describes as ‘closed doors’. She exposes the church in the 24-episode series season 1 alongside former scientologist Mike Rinder (imbd, 2018). She takes cameras into the lives of other former scientologists and families of current scientologists to hear how it how affected them and their family. Remini moderates the series giving her personal story alongside the others. She also gives insight and background information on the church to give more understanding to the audience. Remini’s main focus is on the mental abuse with the church with monetary starving the patrons as well as the physical toll with starvation. Already having aired a second season of the series, Remini’s documentary has already been picked up for a third with works of a fourth. Remini has been accredited for the first season by accepting an Emmy for Outstanding Informational Series (Pasquini and Huver, 2017). The Intellectual Property Corporation (IPC) produces the series and Leah Remini serves as an executive producer through her own No Seriously Productions. Along with IPC executive producers include Eli Holzman, Aaron Saidman, Myles Reiff. It is important to note that the A&E networks hold distribution rights for “Leah Remini: Scientology and the Aftermath.”

With a response of over 2.1 million viewers, the series became the prominent show on the A&E network, according to Variety. With such a large following, the Church of Scientology created a website titled ‘Statement of the Church of Scientology International’ (Wagmeister, 2016). In the statement, the church uses several references of hatred and bigotry. The article continues to compare the series to the Ku Klux Klan: “Just as the production of *Generation KKK* blew up after it leaked that Klan members were on its payroll, the same has been found to be the case for “*Aftermath” and other A&E shows”* (Church of Scientology International, 2018)*.*

The Church of Scientology has responded to the documentary series in a negative way calling the show “sadly, bitterness and anger are common threads through Ms. Remini’s life”. Throughout the show Remini discloses the threats she has received anonymously but believes they are from the church and even may be being followed in a stalker manner. The article, published on Scientology Newsroom anonymously accused Remini of stalking Miscavige and his wife with “obnoxious efforts” and “harassment”.

Remini applauded for her bravery with airing the documentary knowing the backlash that would be received by the large Church of Scientology. Former a loyalist to the church is now exposing her truth on the matter alongside others that dedicated their life to the church or seen others around them do so showed their face and told their side of the story. Remini hopes to bring the church down and expose the acts done to prevent others from joining and ultimately bankrupting the cause.

Analysis

By exposing the Church of Scientology for the world to see, Remini could receive more than one award for the show and gain recognition. She could also bring awareness to the Church of Scientology in the way she wants, in a negative way. She could also increase her credibility and exposure as an influential leader out of Hollywood, California. Remini could lose part of her fan base if any of her fans still are in the Church of Scientology. She could also ruin the relationships between family members by broadcasting family members talking about how the church negatively affected their family. In general, she could influence the future for her subjects in terms of the public knowing their story unlike ever before.

As the catalyst for the series, Leah Remini is the moral agent at the forefront. She took the liberty to write the book calling the church out, then produce a documentary series that involved other people previously involved with the church in a biased way. She held the power to decide what she viewed as being right and wrong when producing this documentary series. Ultimately, she felt it was justified ethically to produce the documentary series in a negative light towards the church that she once was apart of.

In doing so, Leah Remini had to consider how her decision to broadcast extreme backlash against the Church of Scientology. She had to think about the short term and long-term effects, what could come from doing this if the participants could receive justice or even mercy and determining where her loyalty lays with truth versus loyalty. With airing the Church of Scientology’s dirty laundry in the short term she would gain a lot of attraction and media attention. In the long term, the media attention may die and the more harsh effects from the Church of Scientology may set in like with the threats and stalking. She also could also bring down the church in the long term after more seasons set to air, the series may last for a lengthy period of time. Leah Remini states many times that her goal to bring the church down with involving the FBI, the Department of Justice, and the IRS. She hopes to gain traction with the series and bring awareness to the dangerous practices of the church. In that, she hopes to have a long-term effect.

Leah Remini needed a platform for the series, A&E agreed to pick up the show, knowing the repercussions it could bring to the network. The series makes accusations against the church with “secretive teachings, alleged shady business dealings, purported abuses of its followers, former members and their families” according to Business Insider. She definitely took a risk based off of her knowledge of the physical and emotional abuse the church executes on members that choose to leave the church quietly or publically.

The consequences for the stakeholders of those who are currently in the Church of Scientology could give them insights into how others feel. Leah Remini is also a stakeholder in the ethical dilemma of whether she chose to stay quiet and remain loyal to the church or speak her truth. David Miscavige is also a stakeholder as the current leader of the church. He may be worried about his membership with members discovering the series and starting to question their commitment to the faith. With needing a platform to air her series and give a voice to the show, A&E took a risk and as a result they now hold stake in the situation. The network, A&E, is known for being risky in their shows so carrying Leah Remini’s show may not come as a surprise to many so carrying this series that is considered to be crossing a line to some may not be such a shock.

Utilitarianism, part of consequentialism, refers to the greatest good for the greatest number of people (Day, 2006). Ultimately, utilitarianism looks at who can benefit and who can be harmed. The three key aspects to utilitarianism are consequences, impartiality and greatest good for greatest number. Leah Remini uses utilitarianism to base her direction of the show in trying to bring down the Church of Scientology. She believes she is helping people currently in the church, those considering joining the church and those trying to pick up the pieces from their life in the church. With that large group of people she is trying to influence and persuade as many people as possible.

Kantian Ethics and more particularly duty-based ethics states some acts are wrong even if it leads to a desirable outcome (Day, 2006). If applied to if whether or not Leah Remini should produce a series that attack the Church of Scientology, Kantian Ethics would say the act is wrong therefore even if it comes out to a desirable outcome the documentary series should not be produced in the first place. The outcome of the documentary series resulted in a lot of media attention in a negative way therefore Leah Remini achieved what she set out to do.

Financial reasons could very well be an external factor in this case due to the fact that one of the points Leah Remini makes throughout her series is how the church steals from their patrons. Without financial backing from the A&E network, Leah Remini wouldn’t have had such a strong platform to tell the stories she did and continues to do. Given her celebrity status, her worth has led to her ability to fund the series as an executive producer. If she didn’t have the celebrity status that she has from King of Queens, she may not have been able to fund the project or receive as much attention that it has.

If Leah Remini decided not to pursue the Leah Remini: Scientology and the Aftermath then she would be choosing loyalty to the Church of Scientology. Leah Remini could have chosen to look at the short-term effects only and understood how consequential the decision would be and how it could affect her family and those close to her as well as her own safety. The church, known for their attacks on families by slandering them and their families on their platforms, has already published numerous articles about Leah and her family and how she is a liar.

Decision

By applying Utilitarianism to this ethical dilemma, it is ethical for Leah Remini to broadcast her feelings towards the Church of Scientology. In her opinion, by broadcasting the hidden truths of the church she can help the greatest good for the greatest number of people. She gave a platform for what she calls ‘victims’ of the church’s wrongdoings to tell their story. She interviewed countless people about the church to give viewers an inside look behind the closed doors known as the Church of Scientology. Using her own testimony at the forefront, Leah Remini used her status from King of Queens to establish a following and expose the church in a negative way.

She is helping not only those inside the church but those who have experienced the church’s doings firsthand to see the dangers of the church. She is helping those in the church realize the brainwashing and emotional toll the church is having on them to gain the strength to leave. In addition, she is helping those who have been on a firsthand account with the church gain a sense of closure with their story by saying it out loud to someone who understands what they are going through. They can relate on a new level and start to see their life for what it is now not because of the church. With the families of those who are in the church currently, she is giving them a new channel to try to communicate with their loved ones inside the church. According to Remini, the church limits outside world exposure to the media therefore the only way to talk to loved ones is to try to call which even then she said isn’t always allowed. Ultimately, she is helping the public gain awareness with the church. For those who have no affiliation with the church by airing the series on a popular network as A&E, she informed the public on the church by using the first few episodes of the first series to go into great depth on the church’s history, the practices and figures to increase the size of her audience by not limiting it to just those who were familiar with the Church of Scientology.

By helping four different demographics of victims, families of victims, those in the church currently and the public, Leah Remini s definitely used Utilitarianism by finding it ethically sound to produce the documentary series. She sees all the people it would benefit with a better understanding of the church and cope with its affects as the greatest number of people. She does take into account those who it may hurt such as the leaders in the church and those who are in church but believes that percentage of those is far less outweighed by the people who would benefit from seeing the church in a new light.

Conclusion

Leah Remini had the ethical dilemma whether or not to broadcast the inside look at the Church of Scientology with truth vs. loyalty since she was a member of the church for such a long time. With believing in something so long she ignored the truths with it from brainwashing for over 30 years. She was ethical by applying Utilitarianism by looking at how she can impact a large group of people in a positive way. She helped those on her show while giving light for the public to make their own judgments with the Church of Scientology.

Word Count: 2518

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